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Themed Section: COVID-19

The Role of Health Economics and Outcomes Research in Addressing Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)



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While the world awaits new treatments and vaccines for coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), the health economics and outcomes research (HEOR) community is already examining various aspects of the novel coronavirus severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 of the genus *Betacoronavirus* (SARS-CoV-2) pandemic. At this point, the emerging literature mainly considers the cost of the pandemic and health economic issues surrounding the development of policies. Some modeling work is being conducted to determine the potential value of future treatments or vaccines, and those models will no doubt be tailored and used to assess new health technologies as effectiveness data emerge.

We are pleased to present in the current issue a themed section of the first 6 articles that have been accepted to date. We are grateful to Jagpreet Chhatwal and Maarten Postma, who have served as associate editors for the majority of articles *Value in Health* has received. These 6 articles cover a range of topics, including the cost of the pandemic in the broadest sense and assessments of COVID-19 policies and treatments. An article by Ma et al.¹ examines the economic impact associated with “fear of contagion” and other broad categories of costs across a variety of sectors, using China during the Lunar New Year as a case study.

The value of new treatments for COVID-19 can be placed in the context of antiviral treatments for pandemics in general, which is the focus of the systematic review by Dawoud and Soliman.² Health technology assessments may forever be impacted because of the pandemic. This is true for both COVID-19 treatments and other investigational treatments, with trials that are ongoing during the pandemic—an issue that is highlighted in a commentary by Leahy and et al.³ Moreover, as treatments are approved by regulators, issues of affordability and equity require that attention is also given to value. Another commentary by Forsythe et al reminds us: “Ultimately, the world cannot repeat the mistakes that were made 25 years ago, with poor countries being excluded from acquiring treatment due to unaffordable price structures. Economic planning is needed to understand incentives, prices, and cost-effectiveness so that decisions can be made that benefit the entire world.”⁴

The HEOR literature will examine value beyond healthcare interventions and will consider other government policies aimed

at suppressing transmission and reducing the spread of disease. The article by Zala et al.⁵ does exactly that by focusing on a UK policy implemented in the spring of 2020 based on data from prior pandemics. In addition, the article by Reed et al.⁶ explores (through a discrete choice experiment) individuals’ trade-offs between risk of infection and some of the restrictions that have been applied, such as social distancing.

We anticipate continued acceptance of HEOR articles over the coming months and plan to develop a virtual collection of all COVID-19 articles published in *Value in Health* next summer. At that time, Jagpreet and Maarten will produce a more detailed editorial, commenting on the articles the journal has published and giving a more in-depth assessment of the contribution HEOR can make to our understanding of the epidemic and the policy choices available.

We welcome new submissions related to COVID-19 and will continue to make accepted articles available online as quickly as possible so that researchers, policy makers, and the public have access to the most credible and timely HEOR information on the pandemic, COVID-19 treatments and interventions (especially theoretical developments), empirical health technology assessments, and commentaries on critical health policy and social justice topics.

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